A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO INTERNALIZING NATURAL ENGLISH

THE SRS WRITING METHOD

FOR IELTS

GET THE BAND YOU NEED FOR THE IELTS WRITING SECTION

BY JACK ASKEW

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The SRS Writing Method for IELTS will greatly help you improve your writing, make it more natural, and give you the confidence to get the band you want.

With this system you don't need to worry about trying to remember key phrases, grammar, sentence structure etc. as the system takes care of this for you.

If you take the time to go through the steps and commit 15-30 minutes every day, then your writing will greatly improve.

INPUT AND OUTPUT

Many learners feel that to improve their writing they need to write more. But, you can only write what you already know.

In too many cases I see learners writing the same mistakes over and over again. They firstly think in their native language and then translate into English. This causes many problems as both the grammar of writing and the common expressions can't be translated.

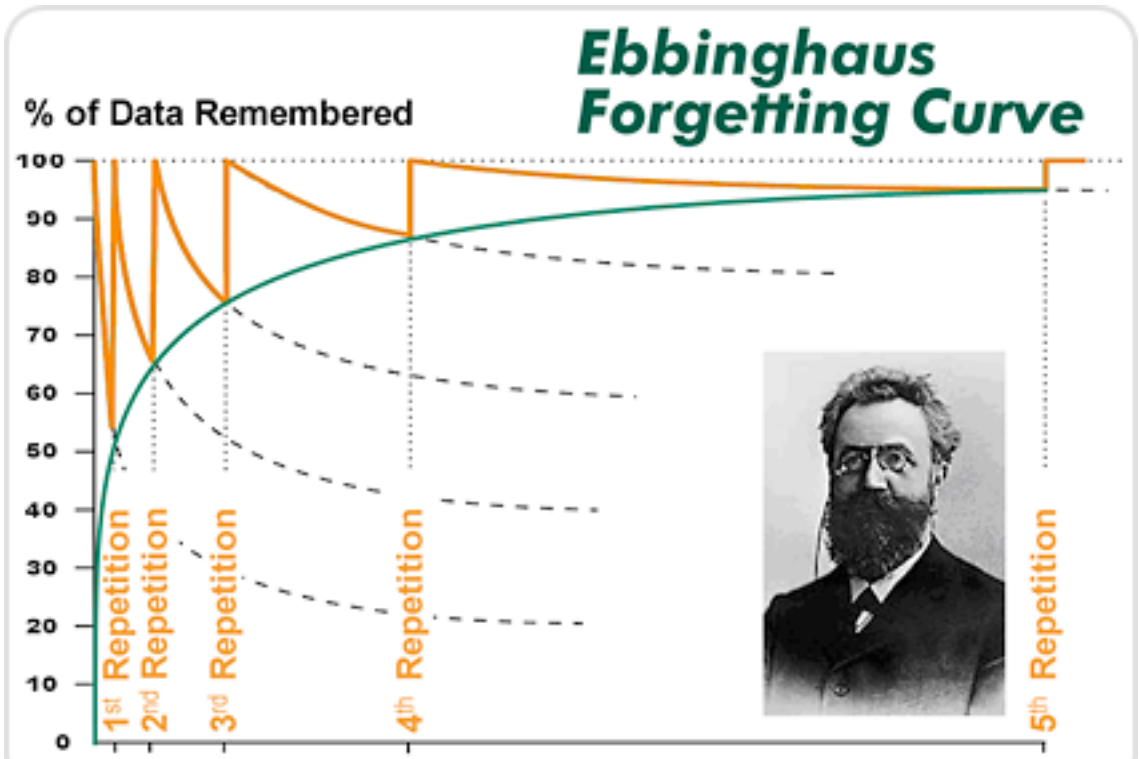
What's more, written English uses a different type of English than spoken English. To be able to write well you need to know the correct grammar and sentence structure of written English.

To do this and get a high band in the IELTS writing section you have to get a lot of input (controlled output is also really important, and this will be discussed later). You need to be exposed to written English to be able to write well.

The SRS Writing Method makes this whole process systematic and effortless. By using Anki (the Spaced Repetition Software that I recommend) you will be able to internalize the correct way to write. You will use the correct sentence structure, expressions, grammar, and use English in a natural way.

This is because you will read and/or write model sentences again and again (in a fun way!).

This system is based on the forgetting curve. This shows us that we need to see something more than once to be able to fully remember it.



As you can see from the above image, the percentage of data remembered goes up with the number of repetitions done. Also notice that the repetitions are spaced out more and more as you go along.

Anki is set up so that you repeat the data (in our case sentences) so that you will remember nearly everything you see. It does this efficiently so that you spend the minimum amount of time repeating the sentences.

Most learners use Anki to remember vocabulary. We are taking this much further! You are going to be able to learn new words in addition to transforming your writing so that you internalize natural English.

The repetition of correct sentences is what you need to do to be able write really well. To explain this further, take a look at the following sentence:

I am from the UK.

If you believe what most people say, this sentence should be difficult. It includes an irregular verb, a preposition, and it uses the definite article for a country. I hear people say all the time that irregular verbs, prepositions, and articles are impossible to learn.

But, this sentence is easy, right? The sentence or phrase above is easy because it is very common. You have seen this or something similar many times. It sounds natural. You don't need to think about the conjugation. Or what preposition to use. Or whether you need an article. It just sounds correct.

The SRS Writing Method will make IELTS constructions easy too. This is because you will see a variety of different sentences many times so that you internalize all the different grammar rules and sentence structure. It is efficient and effective.

INTERNALIZATION

This method focuses on internalizing the correct written English. It doesn't ask you to memorize anything as this is hard work and can lead to penalties in the exam. It doesn't explain grammar, essay types, key vocabulary, or anything else like that.

Instead it focuses on learning through context (model answers), internalizing written English (digital flashcards using Anki), and then getting feedback on your writing (output).

You have everything you need to improve your writing. There are so many model answers out there waiting for you to use. You don't need to spend all your time looking at lists of key vocabulary which is out of context and doesn't really help. Instead, after going through this system, you will naturally produce these sentences.

This method also makes your writing flexible and helps you adapt to any question.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE METHOD

Here is an overview of what you do when using this method:

1. Find, read, and understand model answers.
2. Enter the key sentences into the spaced repetition software (Anki).
3. Spend 15-30 minutes a day using the software.
4. Get feedback on your writing from a tutor.

It's a really simple system once you know what to do.

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FINDING AND READING MODEL ANSWERS

In the past it was very difficult to get model answers as this involved buying a book. Nowadays, there are thousands of model answers that are free and easy to access. The majority of students don't spend a lot of time with these as they aren't exactly sure what to do with them.

(note: make sure to find out what type of test you are taking: general or academic. Part 1 is different depending on which test you take. Part 2 is the same for both tests.)

Let's take a look at the first stage of how to use model answers to improve your writing.

READ

When you find model answers, the first stage of this is to read them. Don't stop to look up words, but just go from start to finish and understand the general meaning.

LOOK UP NEW WORDS

The next stage is to look up words and phrases you don't understand. Most students do this incorrectly and use tools such as Google Translate. Do not use Google Translate! It is not very accurate, especially when translating collocations, expressions etc. Here is what to do instead.

1. Try to understand the word from the context given. Not all words or phrases need to be checked.

2. Look up the English definition. This is important as you want to try and keep the flow of English going. Getting into the habit of using an English dictionary will help you greatly.

3. If the definition doesn't help, use WordReference to make the translation. This is especially useful for terms such as, "on the other hand," "firstly," "furthermore" etc.

4. If that doesn't help, type in the word or phrase into Google and add "in Spanish (or whatever your native language is). You should find this in a forum or online dictionary.

I have an article and video on how to do this properly and efficiently on my site. Click here to read more about this important area.

THE NEXT STEP

Now that you have gone through the model answer, you need to put some of the information into Anki. Part two will show you exactly how to do this.

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ANKI AND FLASHCARDS

Anki is the most popular Spaced Repetition Software and it is going to help you to improve your writing (and overall English) dramatically. This is the heart of the method and you need to make sure that you are doing this properly. This section will show you exactly how to implement Anki into your learning.

DOWNLOAD ANKI

1. Go to the website: http://ankisrs.net/
2. Click download.
3. Install it just like any other software.

That first part is easy, right?

Now it's time to enter your model answer. Here are three things to remember before doing this:

- Always use sentences.
- Always take sentences from context (a model answer that you have read).
- Try to add sentences yourself.

Learning single words causes confusion and also it means that you will not naturally internalize grammar and sentence structure.

Taking random sentences doesn't create any context and also leads to confusion and does not help you when it comes to knowing where the sentence belongs in the greater answer.

And finally, using your own sentences is recommended as you can choose the ones that are specific to you.

Let's look at how to enter sentences into Anki by using the following model answer:

http://www.jdaenglish.com/ielts/writing/task-2/model-answer/

In the first paragraph there is a word that you might not understand:

> People are using social media networks more and more these days. It seems that people love to share their opinions and what they are doing with others. It is argued that this information can be used by others in a **malicious** way. I believe that this all depends on how the these websites are used and the laws in place.

By using Google Dictionary you see the following definition: *Characterized by malice; intending or intended to do harm.*

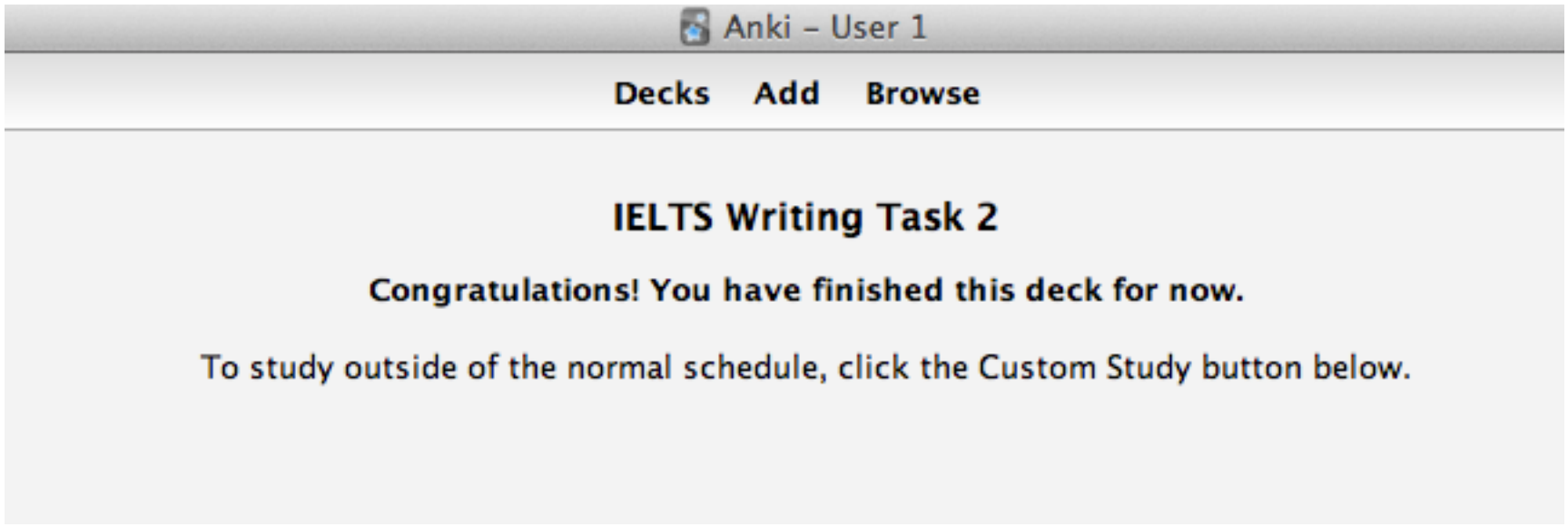
This should be good enough to understand the word. So, let's enter the sentence into Anki.

ADDING SENTENCES INTO ANKI

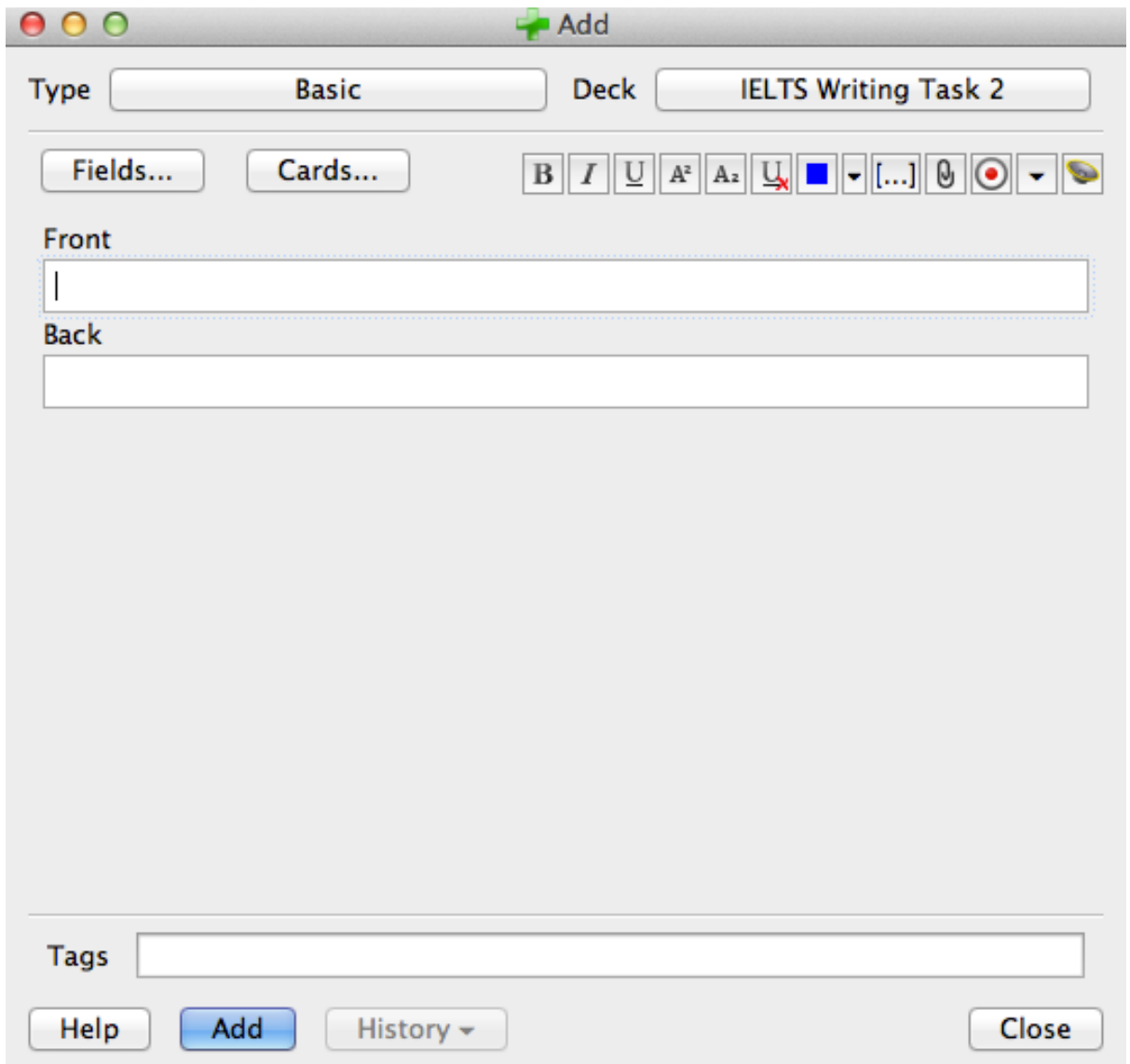
Firstly you need to create a new deck. A deck is like a folder for your sentences.

- At the bottom of your software, click "Create Deck."
- Call it "IELTS Part Two" - (more on decks later.)
- Click "Add" at the top of the screen.

(see image on next page)


Anki – User 1
Decks
Add
Browse
IELTS Writing Task 2
Congratulations! You have finished this deck for now.
To study outside of the normal schedule, click the Custom Study button below.

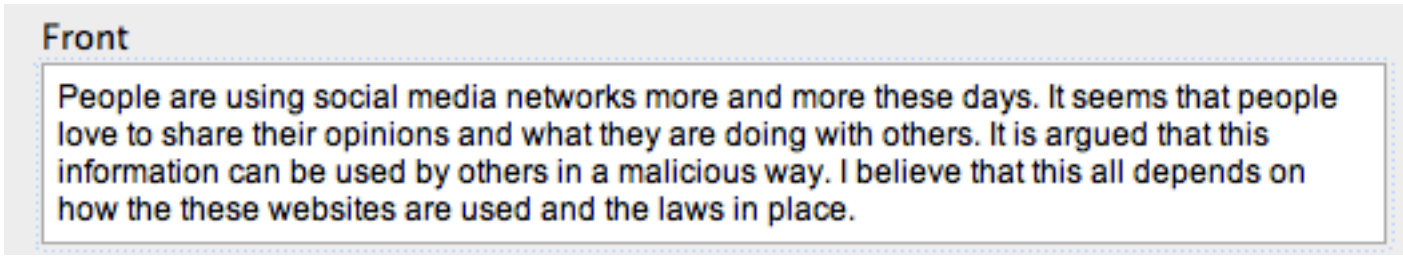
After clicking “Add” you will see the following:



The front is what you see first when you open the flashcards, and the back (of the card) is what you see when you click the card.

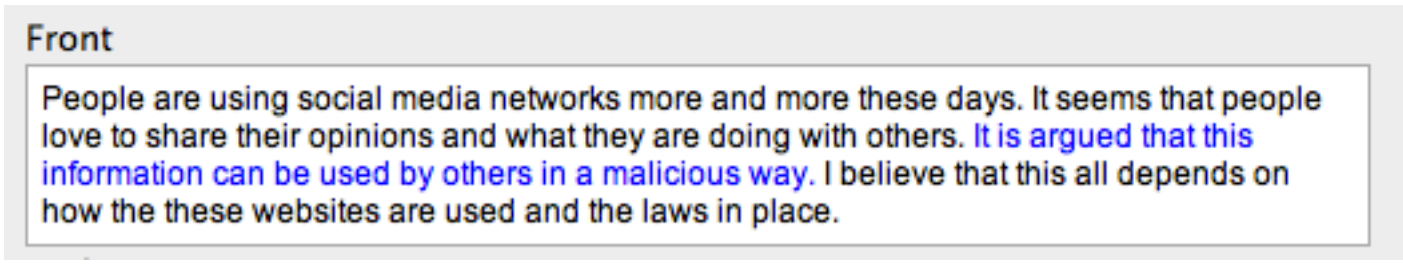
Now you need to do the following:

Copy and Paste First Paragraph into “Front”


Front
People are using social media networks more and more these days. It seems that people love to share their opinions and what they are doing with others. It is argued that this information can be used by others in a malicious way. I believe that this all depends on how the these websites are used and the laws in place.

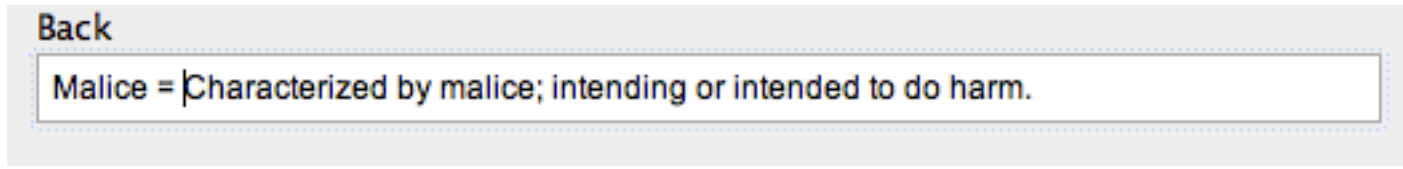
Make the Key Sentence Stand Out (Highlight it)

I prefer to change the color, but you could make it bold or underline it too.


Front
People are using social media networks more and more these days. It seems that people love to share their opinions and what they are doing with others. It is argued that this information can be used by others in a malicious way. I believe that this all depends on how the these websites are used and the laws in place.

Showing the sentence in the context of the paragraph makes you remember where the sentence comes from and helps you understand where each sentence belongs. I highly recommend that you do this when adding your sentences.

Put the definition (or translation) on the “Back”



This will help you remember the definition or translation that you looked up. You don’t need to do this for every card, and after some time you won’t need to look on the back.

Do the same for other sentences

Enter the sentences that you feel are beneficial to you. A good question to ask yourself is, “Could I write that in an exam?” If no, then enter it. If yes, then maybe leave it out.

Be honest with yourself and don’t be egoistic. Understanding something isn’t the same as knowing something. You may understand what it means, but to really know it you need to internalize it (which is done by adding and using the sentence in Anki).

(note: as you enter sentences from the same paragraph, it will say “duplicate.” Just ignore this warning and continue.)

I recommend adding all sentences from the model answer. There is a lot that you can do with a sentence as we are going to see very soon. To do this now is the time to download the Anki deck that came with this guide so that you can see what it is like to use the software.

ADDING YOUR FREE DECK

This is really simple. All you need to do is download your Anki Deck (Click here) and then:

- Go to File: Import.
- Select the Anki File that came with this guide (It’s called, “IELTS Writing Task Two”)

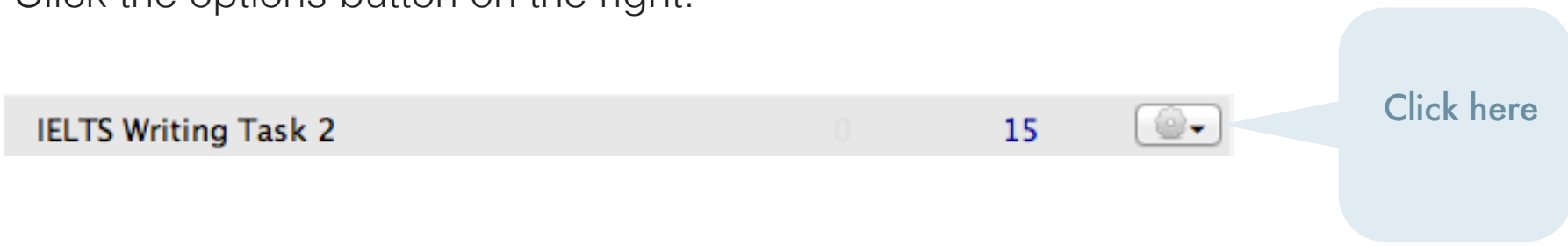
You now have successfully imported the Anki deck. Once you have this deck installed (and/or you have added your own new cards), you are ready to start going through the cards (doing reps).

DOING THE REPS

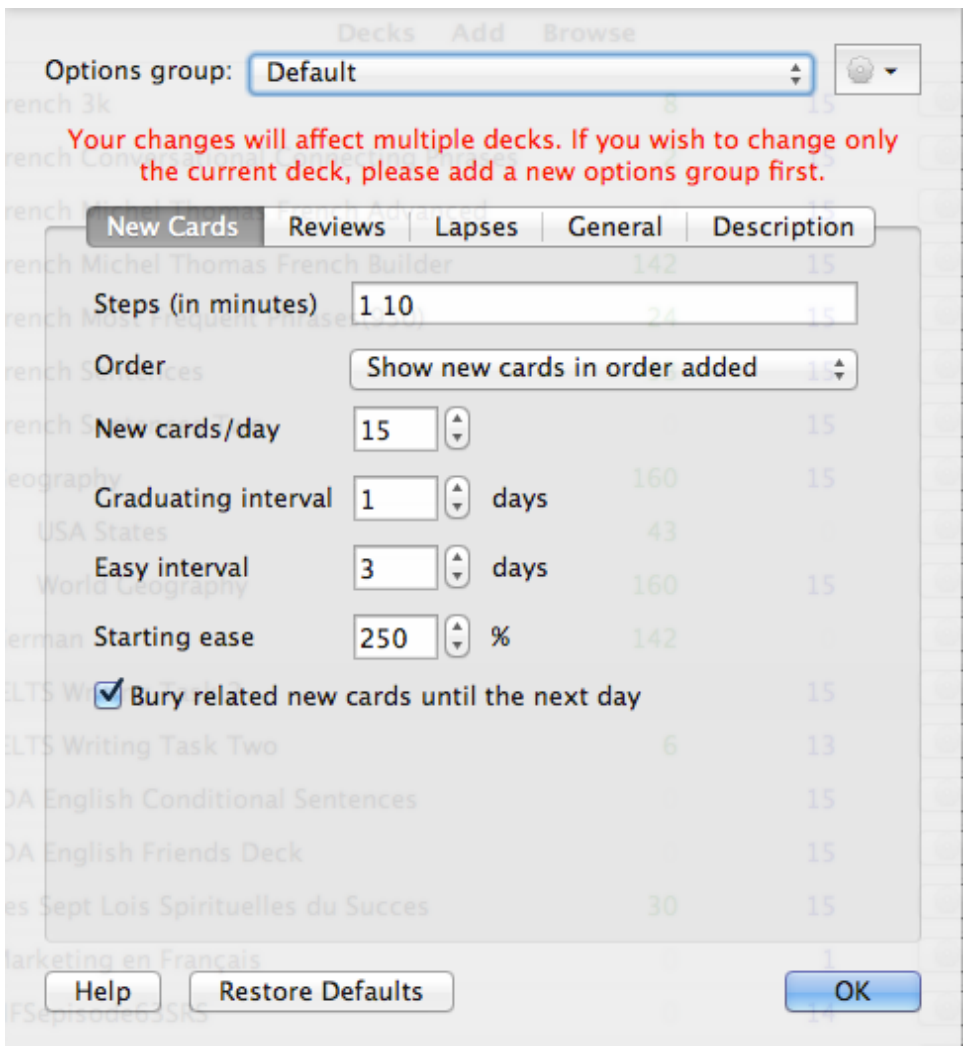
This is where the internalization begins. But, before we start, click “Decks” at the top of the screen. There are a couple of changes we need to make first.

Change the preferences

Click the options button on the right.



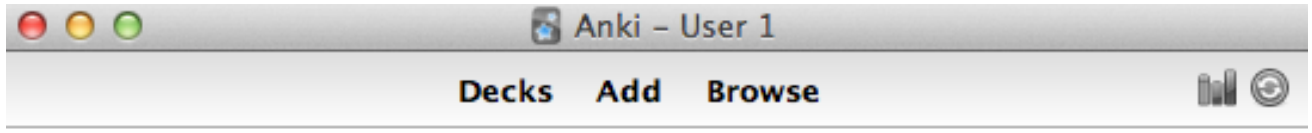
You will see the following screen:

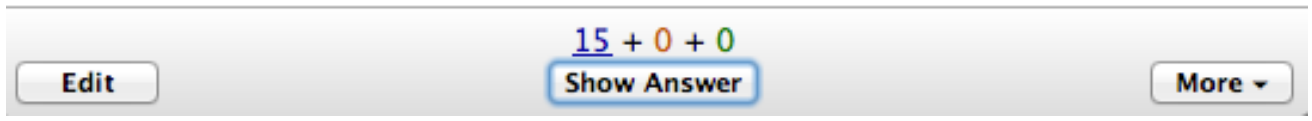


Change New cards/day to 15. Make sure all the other settings are selected like above and then click OK.

OPENING YOUR DECK AND STARTING

Click on IELTS Writing Task 2 and then click “Study Now” You will see the following:


Anki – User 1
Decks
Add
Browse
People are using social media networks more and more these days. It seems that people love to share their opinions and what they are doing with others. It is argued that this information can be used by others in a malicious way. I believe that this all depends on how the these websites are used and the laws in place.



This is your first flashcard! You can see the sentence that you added in blue (as part of a paragraph). At the bottom you see “Show Answer” - this will show the data you entered on the back of the card.

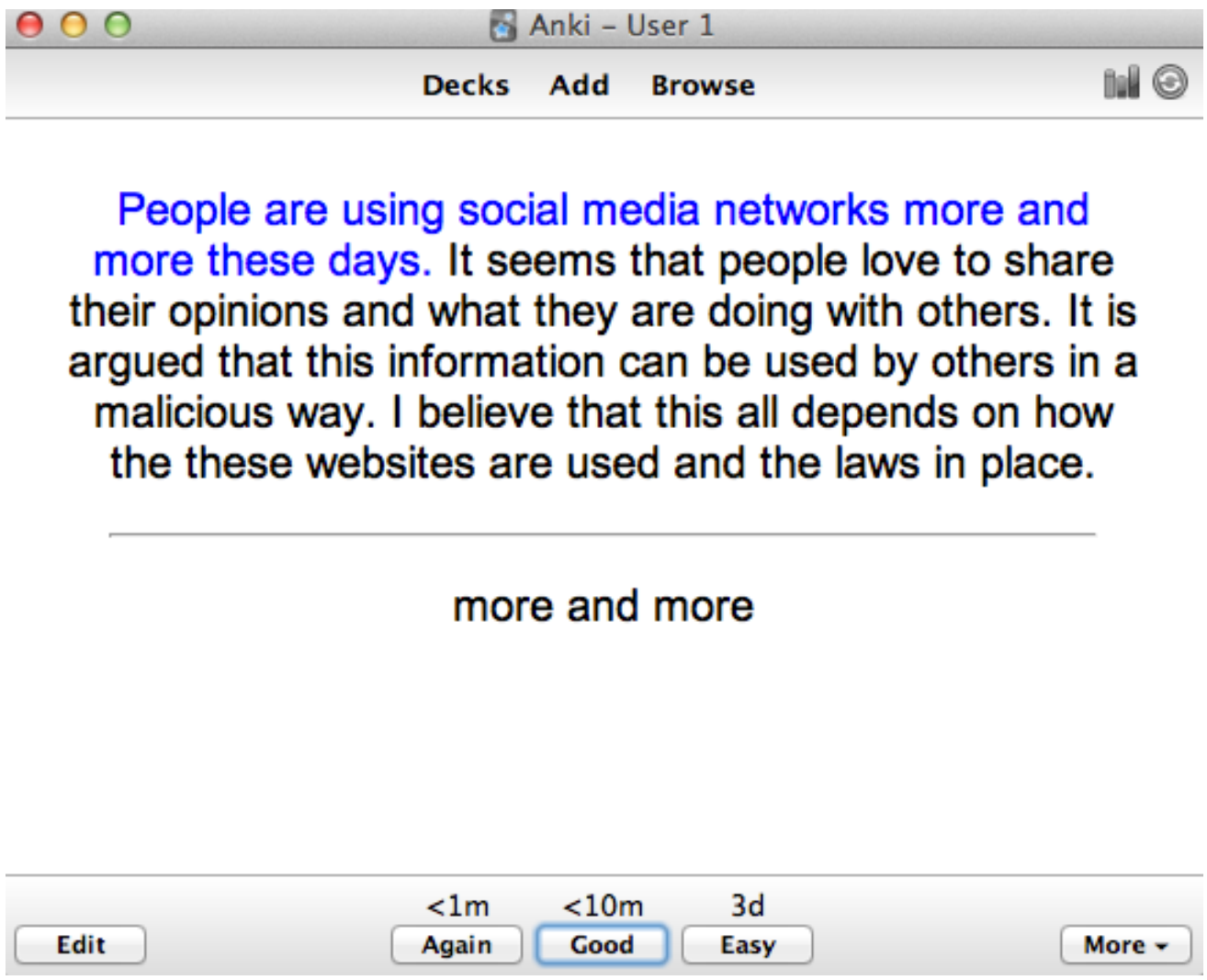
You can edit the card (bottom left) and there are more options (bottom right).

So, what do you do when you see this card? Well, there are three things you can do.

- Read it in your head.
- Read it out loud
- Write it down.

I recommend doing a combination of the three. Writing it down is the best controlled output that you can do. But, as you will see the same card a few times, it is best to do a combination of the three above.

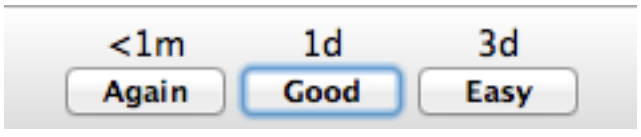
When you click “Show Answer” you see the following:


Anki – User 1
Decks
Add
Browse
People are using social media networks more and more these days. It seems that people love to share their opinions and what they are doing with others. It is argued that this information can be used by others in a malicious way. I believe that this all depends on how the these websites are used and the laws in place.
more and more
<1m
<10m
3d
Edit
Again
Good
Easy
More

The card now shows both the front (the sentence in context) and the back (the definition, focus, or translation) and it also has 3 options for you to select:

- Again (<1 min)
- Good (<10 min)
- Easy (3 days)

My preference for this is to select <1m for every new card you see, then keep clicking <10m. After some time, the card will give you the following options:



I recommend clicking 1d (one day). This means that you will see the card again the next day. The options change the longer that you have them. So, the next option might be 2 days, then 4 days, then 8 days etc.

OTHER TIPS

Adding New Cards and Reviews

The first time you do this you might think that it's easy and want to do more. But, remember that tomorrow you will have 15 reviews and 15 new cards. This soon starts to add up and you will probably have over 100 reviews as well as the new cards.

So, don't do too much on your first day. Just keep reading new model answers and adding new sentences to make sure that you add 15 cards a day (or every other day). Feel free to reduce or increase this amount depending on what you like to do.

Organizing Your Decks

I recommend splitting up your decks into the different parts of the IELTS writing sections. You can also take this further by splitting them further, for example:

- IELTS Writing Task Two
    - Introductions
    - Body
    - Conclusions

- IELTS Part One General
    - Formal letters
    - Informal Letters

- IELTS Part One Academic
    - Pie Charts
    - Bar Charts
    - Process Diagrams
    - Tables

The options above are optional. You may prefer to have all your sentences in one deck or just separate them by parts.

When to Do the Reps

I recommend doing a little here and there. Doing them all at once can be overwhelming, so instead, you can break it up into 2 minute sections and do them when you have time. Ultimately it come down to you and how you work best.

Remember that it is important to write down the sentences, so you need to be in a position to do this. But, one of the great things about Anki is that you can use it on any device (there is a small fee for iPhone and iPad users). This means that you can do them wherever you go.

Try to do the reps every day. If you miss a day, don't panic. Just log in and continue as normal.

Getting into the habit of doing every day is the most important thing. So, set a plan that is manageable and sustainable.

Make it Fun

Most people enjoy using Anki and this method, and you should try to make it as fun as possible. Listen to classical music, smile, and feel completely relaxed when you're reading and writing down the sentences.

It's important to remember that you're not making the effort to remember. Instead, you are trusting the system, feeling relaxed when you see new sentences, and knowing that everything will come together over time.

It's OK to Delete Cards

If there is a sentence that confuses you, just delete it. Not every sentence is needed, and some can cause more harm than do good.

To delete a sentence just click "more" in the bottom right hand corner and click delete.

4

WRITING, OTHER AREAS, CONCLUSION, AND RESOURCES

I recommend taking a little break from writing practice for a couple of weeks while using the method described in this book.

(note: a lot will depend on when you have your exam. If it is in the near future, then you will want to get feedback on your writing as soon as possible.)

After this time, you should start practicing your writing. Find questions online or in your resource books, get some paper and a pen, and start writing.

WRITING ADVICE

If You Have Two Months or More Before Your Exam

Start slowly and try to make your answer as good as possible. Look things up and use guides so that you are using the right vocabulary and constructions.

Relax and don't worry at all about the time. Enjoy it as much as you can!

One or Two Months Before the Exam

Start reducing the time you allow yourself to finish the answer. Build your speed up slowly and stop looking up words and phrases.

Keep doing this until you write your answer within the recommended time (20 minutes for part 1, and 40 minutes for part 2). Remember to leave yourself time so that you can check the answers.

GETTING FEEDBACK

It is really important that you have your teacher check your writing. This feedback is incredibly important as you will learn from your mistakes and it makes sure that you are doing the right things.

As you are writing on paper, you will need a scanner or a camera. A lot of my students just take photos with their mobile phone and send over these picture by email. Try to avoid typing your answers as you want to get used to writing by hand.

What to Do Once You Get Your Feedback

Once your teacher has given you your feedback, you can add the corrected sentences into Anki and learn from your mistakes.

I highly recommend doing this as most learners need to repeat the corrections to stop making mistakes. I too often see learners repeat the same mistakes over again. This is because they have this mistake embedded and it is difficult for them to make a change. So, make sure that you take the extra step to ensure that you internalize the correct sentences.

USING THE SRS METHOD IN OTHER AREAS

This method can also be used to improve your general English, especially when it comes to the reading and speaking section.

You can greatly expand your vocabulary and grammar by using this same method for other readings. You can take IELTS reading texts (or any reading text) and enter the sentences into Anki. This is especially useful when expanding your vocabulary.

Most vocabulary resources (especially vocabulary lists) don't help, and in fact can lead to confusion. Always remember to learn new vocabulary in context: both the context of the sentence and the context of the article.

Grammar

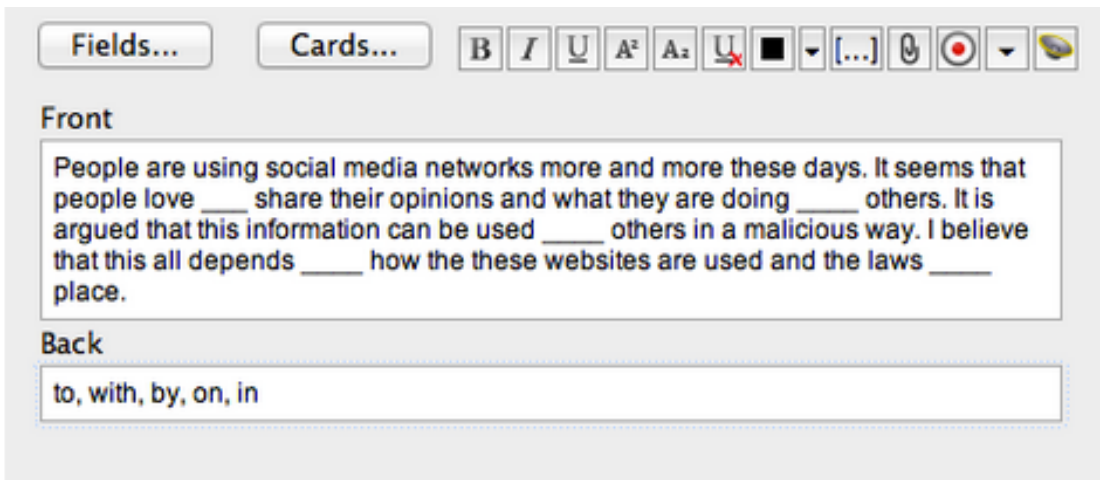
When it comes to improving your grammar, this method is the best I have seen. Your grammar will improve naturally by taking model answers and articles and using this method.

But, if you have a particular problem area, for example prepositions, then you can do the following: Get lots of example sentences.

These can be found in:

- Model answers
- Articles
- Grammar books
- Grammar websites

Take the sentences and enter them into Anki. But, this time, you can do something different: take out the articles that appear in a paragraph and put them on the back. Just like this:


Fields...
Cards...
Front
People are using social media networks more and more these days. It seems that people love ___ share their opinions and what they are doing ____ others. It is argued that this information can be used ____ others in a malicious way. I believe that this all depends ____ how the these websites are used and the laws ____ place.
Back
to, with, by, on, in

So, when you go through the cards, you can test yourself. After a few repetitions, you will easily remember the correct prepositions.

This method is so much more effective than learning grammar rules. After some time doing this, it will just start feeling right.

CONCLUSION

Taking the time to set up this method, and then working on it a little each day is going to do amazing things for your writing and overall English.

Be sure to get into the habit of doing this and make sure it is as enjoyable as possible. Don't worry about trying to remember. Instead, let the system do everything for you.

If you have any questions about this method, then contact support:

jack@jdaenglish.com

RESOURCES

There are many places to get model answers. Here are my favourites:

http://www.ielts-exam.net/

http://www.ielts-writing.info/

http://www.ielts-blog.com/category/ielts-writing-samples/

http://ieltssamples.wordpress.com/ielts-writing-task-2-sample-essays-model-answers/

http://www.dcielts.com/writing-2/ (follow the link to the sample answers).

http://www.ieltsjuice.com/model-writing-answers

You will find more resources by doing a simple search.

Anki

http://ankisrs.net/ - Download Anki

http://ankisrs.net/docs/manual.html - User manual